



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Recovering Endangered Mussels



Aquatic Species Conservation

The Genoa National Fish Hatchery has joined with federal and state partners to recover the endangered Higgins' eye pearl mussel in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.



SW/JSJ

Biologists harvest larvae to place on the gills of host fish. Mussel larvae attach to the gills where they live for 3-6 weeks, then they detach and drop to the riverbed. Host fish are kept in submerged cages, positioned over suitable river habitats, until the mussels detach.

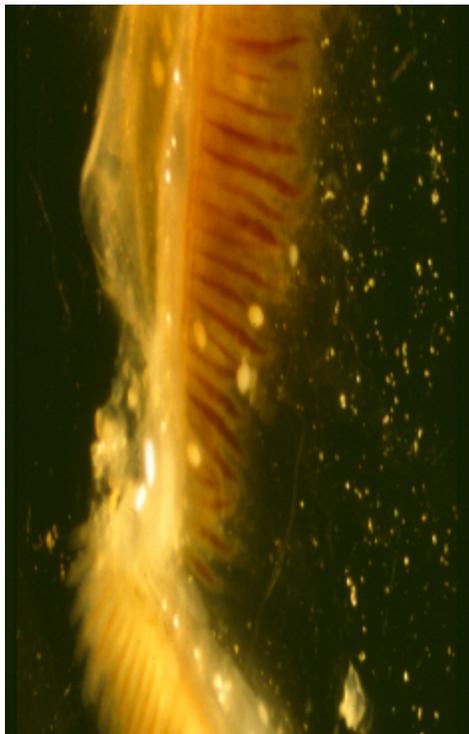
The Fisheries Program plans to use propagation as a tool to increase the recruitment and survival of juvenile mussels until imperiled populations can sustain themselves again.

Siltation from poor land use practices, zebra mussel infestation, and pollution have caused mussel populations to decline drastically. Over 250,000 juvenile mussels were produced at Genoa in 2002 and stocked at three different recovery sites. Many juveniles stocked previously are now being found during dive surveys.



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An adult Higgins' eye pearl mussel seen after it was cleaned of zebra mussels. Zebra mussels can attach to freshwater mussels and cover them. This can cause freshwater mussels to suffocate or slowly starve to death.



SW/JSJ

Encysted mussel larvae appear as grains of rice on fish gills.



MARC DAVIS, MINNDR

Divers recovered many juvenile mussels from host fish cages in 2002, including Higgins' eye pearl mussels.

Partners include the Corps of Engineers, Twin Cities ES Field Office, La Crosse Fishery Resources Office, and the Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin DNRs, NPS, and academic institutions.

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